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Characterization of triglycerides photooxidation under solar radiations: A stepwise Raman study

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Abstract

Triglycerides (TGs) are one of the main components of the glycerolipid family. Their main task in cells is to store excess fatty acids. TG energy storage is mainly concentrated in adipocytes. TGs and free fatty acids constitute the majority (57.5%) of the skin surface lipids (SSLs). TGs are essential for the formation of the skin water barrier. This work is the second part of a global study that aims to evaluate the effect of solar radiations on SSLs using vibrational spectroscopy. In the first part of this work, a stepwise characterization of free fatty acids was performed, and different spectral descriptors were used to follow the different structural modifications during the photo-oxidation process, that is hydrogen abstraction, formation of hydroperoxides and peroxy radicals as primary oxidation products and the formation of aldehydes, ketones, alcohol as secondary products. In this second part, the photo-oxidation of TGs was evaluated using Raman spectroscopy. A decrease in the CH_2/CH_3 stretching bands ratio that confirmed the hydrogen abstraction, an increase in the $1165/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($\delta(\text{OH})$ and $\nu(\text{C}-\text{O})/\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (ester)) ratio indicated the formation of secondary oxidation products such as hydroperoxides. And finally, an increase in the $1725/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (ald.)/ $\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (ester)) ratio and the *trans* $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ /*cis* $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ ratio highlighted the formation of aldehydes, alcohols, ketone, *trans* secondary products and others.

KEYWORDS

lipid Peroxidation, malondialdehyde, skin surface lipids, solar radiations, triglycerides, vibrational spectroscopy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Lipids are heterogeneous biomolecules with many important roles. In humans, lipids can function as energy substrates, steroid hormones, inflammatory mediators, transporters and as structural elements of cellular and organelle membranes.¹

Lipids include eight major classes with distinct chemical properties: fatty acids, glycerolipids, glycerophospholipids, sphingolipids, sterols, prenol, glycolipid and polyketides.^{1,2}

Lipid peroxidation (LPO) is the most studied biologically relevant free radical chain reaction.³ It generates reactive oxygen species (ROS) that oxidize the polyunsaturated lipids, and it is thus considered a critical step in the pathogenesis of several disease states.⁴⁻⁶ In the skin, LPO is mainly related to photooxidation. It induces an alteration in

Abbreviations: LPO, lipid peroxidation; MDA, malondialdehyde; ROS, reactive oxygen species; SSLs, skin surface lipids; TG, triglyceride.

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the barrier function and may lead to skin diseases, such as photoaging, psoriasis, atopy and skin cancer.⁷⁻¹⁰

Thus, the study of changes in the structure of lipids and the analysis of LPO products have received significant attention in recent years in the field of medicine and biology. It has been linked to a wide range of diseases, including cancer,¹¹ cardiovascular diseases¹² and neurodegenerative disorders.^{13,14}

Polyunsaturated lipids with two or more double bonds are more prone to LPO. LPO is initiated by free radicals (ROS) and produces hydroperoxides as primary products. These latter are unstable and decompose rapidly into a variety of aldehyde products as secondary products, especially malondialdehyde (MDA), 4-hydroxy-2-nonenal (HNE), 4-hydroxy-2-hexenal (4-HHE) and other minor products.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

LPO can be produced by auto-oxidation, enzymatic oxidation or photo-oxidation initiated by radiant energy, such as ultraviolet, solar radiations or artificial light.^{5,6,17,18}

Even though solar UVRs are essential to the body such as stimulating the production of vitamin D, they can induce oxidative stress that alters lipid composition. For example, solar UV exposure can reduce FAs and triglycerides (TGs) in the epidermis, which results in skin photoaging.¹⁹

Many methods described in the literature have been used to determine the degree of LPO, including spectrophotometry, high-performance liquid chromatography and gas chromatography coupled to the mass spectrometry.²⁰⁻²⁵

In addition, vibrational spectroscopy has also been used to characterize LPO products.^{17,26-29} Vibrational techniques are well suited for use with biological samples as they provide highly specific, molecular-level information without the need for significant sample preparation or large sample volumes.³⁰ More specifically, Raman spectroscopy can operate in aqueous environments and can be directly used in situ.³¹

In the first part of this study, vibrational spectroscopy was used to evaluate modifications in FFAs during the oxidation process, including saturated and unsaturated types with various double bonds and chain lengths. Raman descriptors were used to track the formation of hydroperoxides, alcohols, and fragmentation of alkyl chains, and IR spectroscopy was used to confirm the formation of hydroperoxides and secondary oxidation products such as aldehydes.¹⁷

In this part, the effect of solar radiations on TGs was investigated. TGs are one of the main components of the glycerolipid family.³² They are the major metabolic energy and fatty acid storage molecules in most organisms.³³ TGs are a heterogeneous group of molecules with a glycerol backbone and three FAs linked by ester bonds. Their physical and chemical properties differ depending on the chain length and degree of unsaturation of their FAs.³³

TGs serve multiple important functions in living organisms. Due to their highly anhydrous property, TGs are the primary storage molecules of FAs for energy utilization and the synthesis of membrane lipids. TGs in plants are the main constituent of seed oils and are an important resource in food consumption and industrial uses. Moreover, they can be used for biofuels.³³

In animals, the energy storage of TG is mainly concentrated in adipocytes. In addition to their role in storing energy, TG synthesis in

cells protects them from the potentially toxic effects of excess FAs. Although TGs are essential for normal physiology, an excessive accumulation of TGs in human adipose tissue contributes to obesity and is associated with organ dysfunction in non-adipose tissue.³³

TGs and free fatty acids constitute the largest part of the skin surface lipids (SSLs) (57.5%). TGs are essential for the formation of the skin water barrier³⁴ and act as a mechanical cushion around joints and internal organs, and collections of TG in adipose tissue provide insulation for organisms.³³

The aim of this paper was to monitor and evaluate the modifications and changes that may take place after solar irradiation on TGs using Raman spectroscopy. Saturated and unsaturated TGs with different numbers of double bonds and different chain lengths were used.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Chemicals

Tripalmitolein, 1,2-palmitolein-3-palmitin, 1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein, trilinolein and trilinolenin (Table 1) were purchased from Laro-dan (Solna, Sweden). Chloroform was purchased from Carlo Erba (Chaussée du Vexin, Val-de-Reuil, France). Lipid films are prepared by dissolving fatty acids in chloroform to obtain solutions of 2 mg/mL concentration. Each solution of 20 μ L was deposited on CaF₂ slides. The lipid films were then dried to remove residual solvent traces.

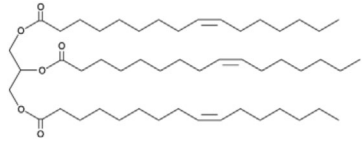
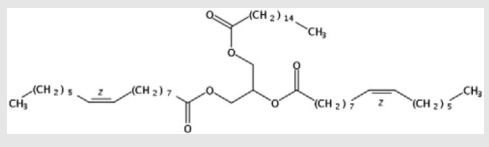
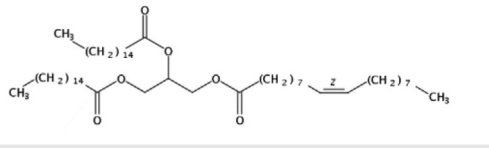
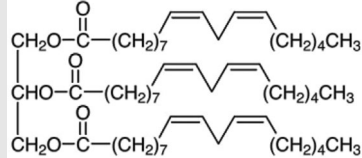
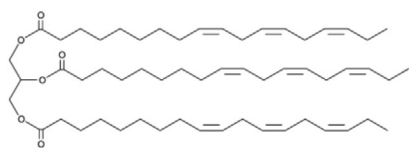
2.2 | Samples irradiation

The five TG were irradiated at different times using a solar simulator 16S-300 (Solar Light, Glenside, PA, USA) which produces a spectrum close to the solar spectrum. The power used for the irradiation was 0.45 W/cm². This power was measured using a pyranometer (Glenside, PA, USA). Table 2 shows the different energies used during the irradiation process.

2.3 | Raman spectroscopy

Raman spectral acquisitions were performed with an HR LabRAM microspectrometer (Horiba scientific, Palaiseau, France). The excitation source is a 633-nm single-mode diode laser (TOPTICA Photonics, Germany) with 35 mW laser power on the sample. The microspectrometer is equipped with an Olympus microscope, and measurements were recorded using a \times 100 MPlan objective (Olympus, Japan). Light scattered by the sample is collected through the same objective. A Peltier-cooled (-65°C) multichannel-coupled charge device detector (1024 \times 256 pixels) detects the Raman Stokes signal dispersed with a 400- μ m slit width and a 600 grooves/mm holographic grating enabling a spectral resolution of 2 cm⁻¹. A calibration procedure was applied daily prior to data collection as recommended by Horiba Scientific. The zero-order position and the laser line were daily checked. Raman

TABLE 1 The 5 triglycerides used in this study lipid

TG1	Tripalmitolein	(C16:1/C16:1/C16:1)	
TG2	1,2-Palmitolein-3-palmitin	(C16:1/C16:1/C16:0)	
TG3	1,2-Palmitin-3-palmitolein	(C16:0/C16:0/C16:1)	
TG4	Trilinolein	(C18:2/C18:2/C18:2)	
TG5	Trilinolenin	(C18:3/C18:3/C18:3)	

Abbreviation: TG, triglyceride.

TABLE 2 The different solar radiations doses applied to triglyceride (TG) during irradiation in J/cm²

Time (min)	2.5	5	10	20	40	60	90	120	180	240
Total solar spectrum energy (J/cm ²)	67.5	135	270	540	1080	1620	2430	3240	4860	6480
UV-B energy (J/cm ²)	0.225	0.45	0.9	1.8	3.6	5.4	8.1	10.8	16.2	21.6
Minimal erythemal dose	7.5 MED	15 MED	30 MED	60 MED	120 MED	180 MED	270 MED	360 MED	540 MED	720 MED

relative shift was checked on silica wafer band at 521 cm⁻¹. For the study, the selected spectral range was 400–3800 cm⁻¹. The acquisition of each spectrum required 3 min. Spectral acquisition was performed using LabSpec6 software (Horiba Jobin Yvon SAS, Lille, France).

2.4 | Data analysis

Raman data were analysed with a software developed in-house that operates in the Matlab environment (The MatWorks, Inc., Natick, MA, USA). The background, due to the fluorescence, was corrected using a polynomial function with a polynomial order of 4.³⁵ All spectra were smoothed using the Savitzky–Golay filter on nine points with a polynomial order of 4 and normalized to the AUC of the CH stretching band. Automatic determination of the peak positions was performed using second derivatives.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 | Solar radiations effects on tripalmitolein, 1,2-palmitolein-3-palmitin and 1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein

TGs are tri-esters consisting of a glycerol bound to three fatty acid molecules. Hence, the oxidation takes place on the fatty acids chain as the ester function remains intact during the oxidation process.²⁶

As explained in the introduction, only the polyunsaturated fatty acids with two or more double bonds are prone to oxidation. Saturated and monounsaturated fatty acids are less vulnerable to LPO.^{17,36}

As expected, no LPO-related modification was observed in the Raman spectra of tripalmitolein (TG1), 1,2-palmitolein-3-palmitin (TG2) and 1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein (TG3) after applied doses up to 6480 J/cm² (data not shown).

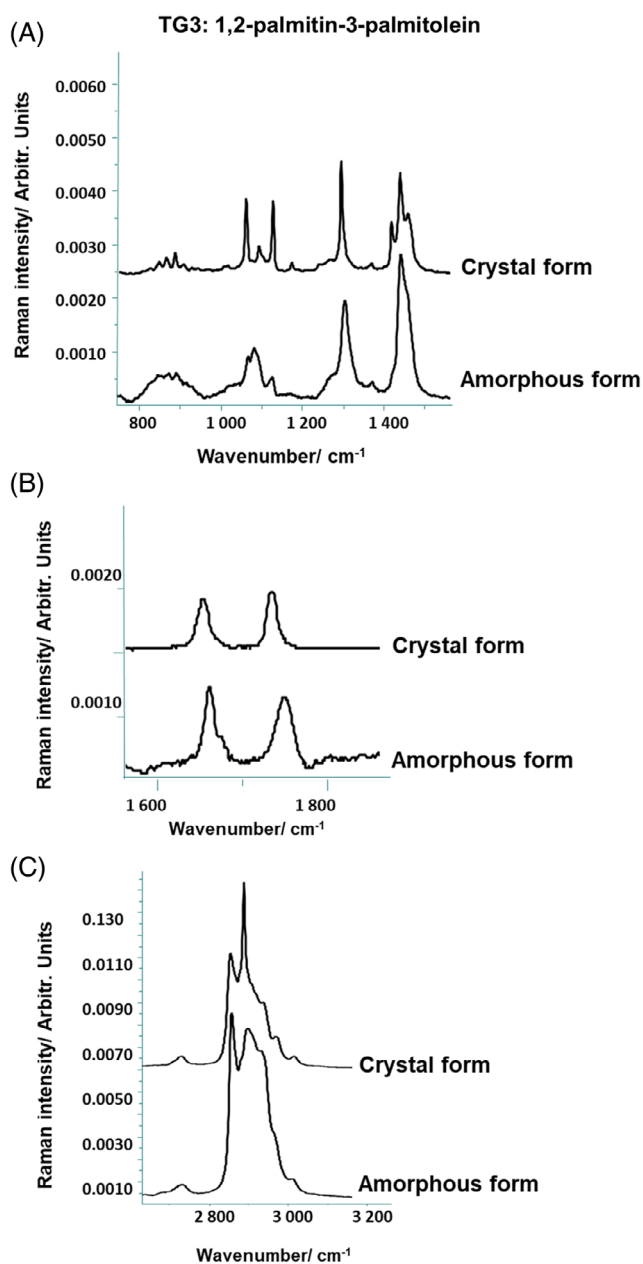


FIGURE 1 Raman spectra of Crystal and amorphous forms of 1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein (TG3). (A) 750–1470 cm⁻¹ region, (B) 1550–1850 cm⁻¹ region and (C) 2700–3200 cm⁻¹ region.

In addition to oxidation descriptors, conformational order and lateral packing descriptors were also monitored. No significant variations of the *trans/gauche* ratio of the C–C stretching bond and of the $\nu(\text{CH}_2)$ asym/ $\nu(\text{CH}_2)$ sym ratio were noticed for the TG1 and TG2 during the irradiation (data not shown).

For TG3 (1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein), a change in the state was observed during irradiation (crystal to amorphous). This change was more associated with heating under solar radiations rather than photooxidation.

The spectra of both crystal and amorphous states are presented in Figure 1. For crystal form, the 2800–3000 cm⁻¹ region was dominated

by the CH₂ symmetric stretching at about 2880 cm⁻¹. This indicated the presence of a high density of *trans* conformers. For the amorphous form, this band disappeared, and a broadening in the 2800–3000 cm⁻¹ region was observed revealing an increase of the *gauche* conformers (Figure 1C).

Same observations were obtained from C–C stretching bands at 900–1150 cm⁻¹. At the crystal state, the region was characterized by sharp peaks and dominated by *trans* conformers (at ~1065 and ~1130 cm⁻¹), whereas the amorphous form presented a series of overlapping broad bands dominated by a central band at 1080 cm⁻¹ (Figure 1A).

In addition to the chain conformational order, the intermolecular chain packing arrangements were affected (Figure 1A). The doublet at ~1440 and ~1470 cm⁻¹ were used as a marker of the presence of crystal form. Moreover, the presence of the factor group splitting band (~1420 cm⁻¹) indicated a highly organized orthorhombic perpendicular subcell packing.^{37,38} In amorphous liquid-like state, these bands were replaced by a unique band at almost 1445 cm⁻¹.

The Raman signature of the C=O stretching of the ester was also impacted by the state change with a shift from ~1730 cm⁻¹ for crystal form to ~1750 cm⁻¹ for amorphous state.³⁹

The crystal-to-liquid-like state change was observed gradually according to the irradiation time. Indeed, the observation of individual spectra after each cumulative dose revealed an increasing number of TG3 amorphous spectra in the function of the irradiation time. For example, after 10 min of irradiation, the two first spectra corresponded to the amorphous state and seven spectra to the crystal form against 3–6 amorphous to crystal spectra for 20 min. This can be explained by the return to crystal-organized form during spectral acquisition. After 1 h or longer continuous irradiation, the amorphous state remained.

3.2 | Solar radiation effects on trilinolein and trilinolenin

Trilinolein and trilinolenin are homogeneous TGs that contain three identical fatty acids. The former contains fatty acids with double unsaturations and the latter fatty acids with triple unsaturations.

The mechanism of the oxidation of TG with polyunsaturated fatty acids is presented in Figure 2I with the example of trilinolenin oxidation.^{40–45} Figure 2II,III presents the evolution of Raman oxidation descriptors for trilinolein and trilinolenin, respectively.

The production of allylic radicals by hydrogen abstraction in alpha position (α), relative to the fatty acid chain double bond, is the first step in the oxidation process (Figure 2I.A).^{17,40} This induces a loss in CH₂ numbers and thus the decrease of CH₂ stretching/CH₃ stretching ratio (Figure 2II.A,III.A). At further steps of oxidation, the decrease is related to the fragmentation of the alkyl chains.

It is worthy to notice the CH₂ stretching/CH₃ stretching ratio values before irradiation. For trilinolein, the ratio is almost 0.87 (Figure 2II.A) for a CH₂/CH₃ = 12.6 (38 CH₂ to 3 CH₃). In our previous study, the same ratio (~0.87) was obtained for sebaleic acid with a CH₂/CH₃ ratio equal to 12.¹⁷

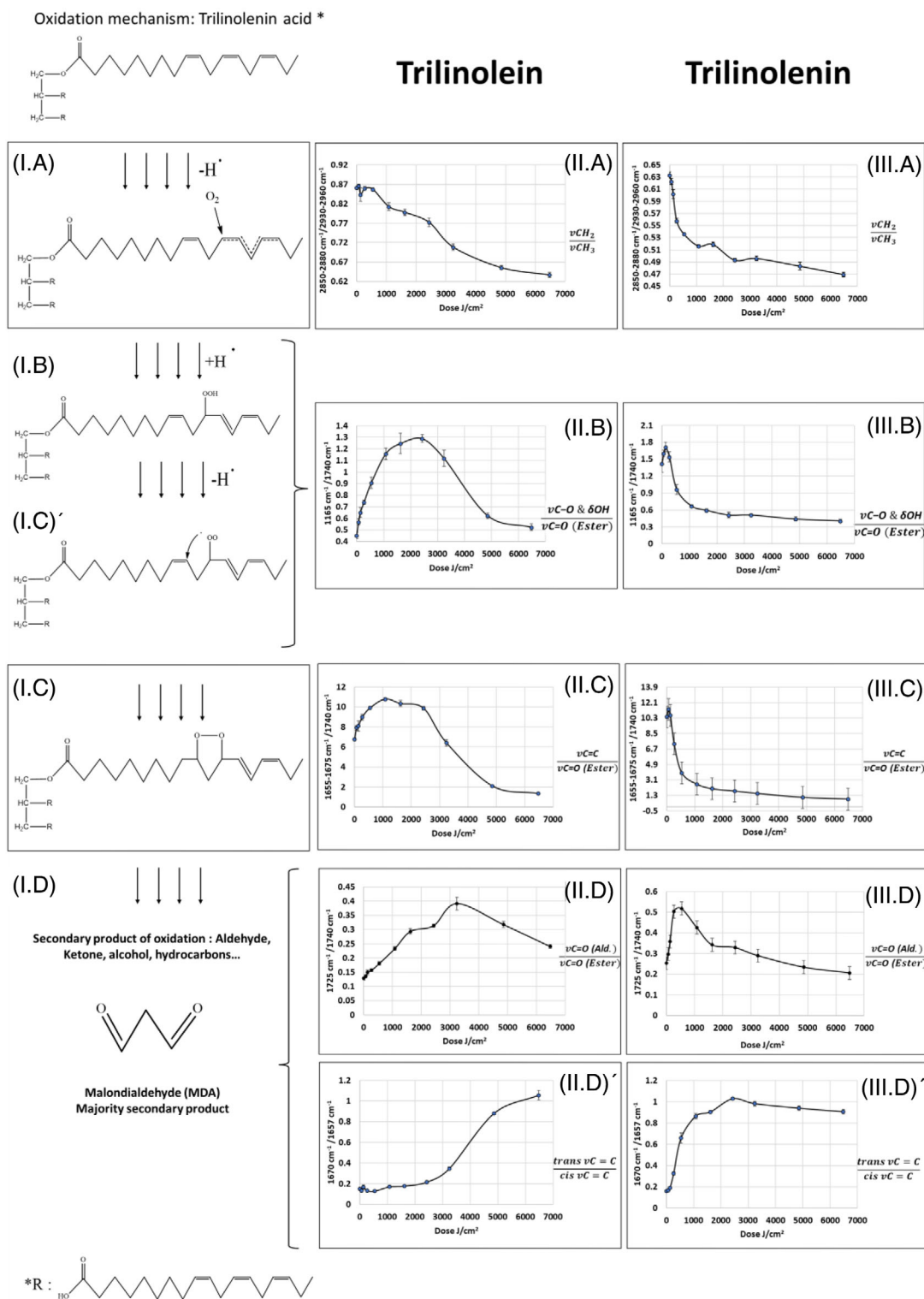


FIGURE 2 (I) Oxidation mechanism of polyunsaturated alkyl chain in triglyceride (TG) (* example of trilinolenin): [(I.A) hydrogen abstraction; (I.B) hydro-peroxidation; (I.B') peroxy radicals formation; (I.C) cyclization; (I.D) formation of secondary oxidation products]. (II) Raman descriptors of trilinolein oxidation. (III) Raman descriptors of trilinolenin descriptors: [(II.A, III.A) CH_2/CH_3 stretching ratio; (II.B, III.B) $\delta(\text{OH})$ and $\nu(\text{C}-\text{O})/\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (ester) ratio; (II.C, III.C) $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})/\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (ester) ratio; (II.D, III.D) $\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ (aldehyde)/ $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ ratio; (II.D', III.D') $\text{trans } \nu(\text{C}=\text{C})/\text{cis } \nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ ratio].⁵³⁻⁵⁷

In contrast, for trilinolenin ($\text{CH}_2/\text{CH}_3 = 10.6$ (32 CH_2 to 3 CH_3)) and linolenic acid ($\text{CH}_2/\text{CH}_3 = 10$), the CH_2 stretching/ CH_3 stretching ratio values were 0.63 and 0.72, respectively. The low ratio observed for trilinolenin can be explained by its high auto-oxidation rate. The hydrogen abstraction started before irradiation, and thus, the number of CH_2 was lower.^{46,47}

In the second step, hydroperoxides were produced as primary oxidation products (Figure 2I.B).¹⁷ This can be monitored by following the relative evolution of the band at 1165 cm^{-1} ($\delta(\text{OH})$ bending and $\nu(\text{C}-\text{O})$ stretching). For relative monitoring, this band was divided by the 1740 cm^{-1} band associated with $\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ stretching specific to esters. The choice of the 1740 cm^{-1} band as internal standard was related to the fact that the ester function remains intact during the oxidation process.²⁶

For trilinolein, the $1165/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ratio showed an increase from ~ 0.45 before irradiation up to ~ 1.3 after irradiation at 2430 J/cm^2 indicating the formation of hydroperoxides at these doses (Figure 2II.B). After 2430 J/cm^2 , the ratio decreased to reach a plateau at ~ 0.5 . This decrease indicated the fragmentation of hydroperoxides and the formation of higher peroxy radicals.^{17,48} The plateau after 4860 J/cm^2 was at almost the same value before irradiation, which indicated that the observation included the beginning of the formation of hydroperoxides, the increase of their number, then their fragmentation and complete decomposition.

For trilinolenin, the $1165/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ratio was ~ 1.5 before irradiation. It increased up to ~ 1.7 135 J/cm^2 and was followed by a marked decrease to reach a plateau at ~ 0.35 after 1080 J/cm^2 (Figure 2III.B). The high values observed before irradiation were indicative to the presence of hydroperoxides and confirmed the auto-oxidation that was observed by the hydrogen abstraction descriptor. The same information was obtained from the variations in the 1165 cm^{-1} band observed on the Raman spectra plotted in Figure 3A,D.

As described in our previous work on free fatty acids oxidation,¹⁷ hydroperoxides and peroxy radicals are unstable and decompose to a variety of volatile compounds, including aldehydes, ketones, hydrocarbons and other secondary products.⁴⁸

To lead to the formation of these secondary products, a cyclization mechanism (Figure 2I.C) takes place.

The loss of a double bond due to the cyclisation mechanism (Figure 2I.C) can be monitored by the relative evolution of 1675 cm^{-1} ($\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$). Thus, cyclisation should be related to a decrease in the $1655\text{--}1675/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})/\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ ester) ratio and a decrease in the AUCs of the bands at around 970 cm^{-1} (out of plane vinyl CH bending, $\delta(=\text{CH})$), 1267 cm^{-1} (in plane vinyl CH bending, $\delta(=\text{CH})$) and 3010 cm^{-1} (vinyl CH stretch, $\nu(=\text{CH})$) (Figure 3A,C,D,F).

For trilinolein (Figure 2II.C), an increase was observed from 0 to 1080 J/cm^2 followed by a plateau until 2403 J/cm^2 . At these doses, no modification was observed for the 970 , 1267 and 3012 cm^{-1} bands (Figure 3A,C,D,F). Based on this, the relative increase of the AUC of the 1675 cm^{-1} band cannot be related to variations in the number of double bonds. It can rather be associated with the conjugated double bonds that were generated during the oxidation process (Figure 2I.B,I,B').

After 2403 J/cm^2 , a marked decrease was observed. This decrease can be associated with the loss of double bond and was confirmed by the decrease in the AUC of the out-of-plane vinyl CH bending (970 cm^{-1}), the in-plane vinyl CH bending (1267 cm^{-1}) and the vinyl CH stretch (3010 cm^{-1}) (Figure 3A,C,D,F). It is important to note the parallel evolution between the decomposition of hydroperoxides and peroxy radicals (Figures 2II.B,III.B) and the cyclisation (Figure 2II.C).

Trilinolenin cyclisation (Figure 2III.C) started after 67.5 J/cm^2 . An abrupt decrease of the $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})/\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ ester ratio was observed after 135 J/cm^2 simultaneously with the increase in the hydroperoxidation markers.

In the final steps of the oxidation mechanisms, aldehydes, ketone, alcohols and other secondary products were produced. MDA was described as the major secondary product (Figure 2I.D).¹⁷

The formation of these products can be followed by the evolution of the $1725/1740\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ ald./ $\nu(\text{C}=\text{O})$ ester) ratio. For both TGs, this ratio showed an increase, simultaneously with other oxidation steps. The maximum values were obtained at 3240 and 540 J/cm^2 for trilinolein and trilinolenin, respectively (Figure 2II.D,III.D). After these doses, the balance between the production of the volatile compounds and their evaporation was inverted resulting in a decrease in the ratio values.

Finally, the increase in the *trans* conformers was described by Muik et al. as related to the formation of *trans* secondary oxidation products.²⁶ The *trans* $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})/\text{cis}$ $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ ratio is presented in Figure 2II.D',III.D'. For trilinolein, a marked increase was observed after 3240 J/cm^2 (Figure 2II.D') with a dose decay compared to the decrease in the global $\nu(\text{C}=\text{C})$ content (Figure 2II.C). The continuous increase of the *trans/cis* ratio was associated with the presence of other *trans* secondary oxidation products than the volatile compounds.

Similar observations were obtained for trilinolenin (Figure 2III.D') with a plateau for higher doses. This was related to the higher oxidation rate of this TG. The conformer changes were also seen by the broadening of the peak at around 1657 cm^{-1} in Raman spectra for both TGs (Figure 3B,E).

In addition to the structural evolution, organizational and conformational changes were observed. Figure 3C,F shows a decrease of the $\nu(\text{CH}_2)$ asym shoulder at around 2870 cm^{-1} indicating higher inter-chain disorder along with irradiation. As mentioned in our previous study, the decrease in the AUC of the 2870 cm^{-1} band may contribute to the observed decrease of the CH_2/CH_3 ratio.¹⁷

4 | CONCLUSION

SSLs and stratum corneum (SC) lipids represent the first barrier protecting our body against external insults. Even though the effect of solar radiations on skin is well documented, their effect on Skin SSLs and SC lipids is generally observed at the end of the oxidation process.^{49–52}

This paper is the second part of a global study that aims to put together different spectral descriptors to follow the different

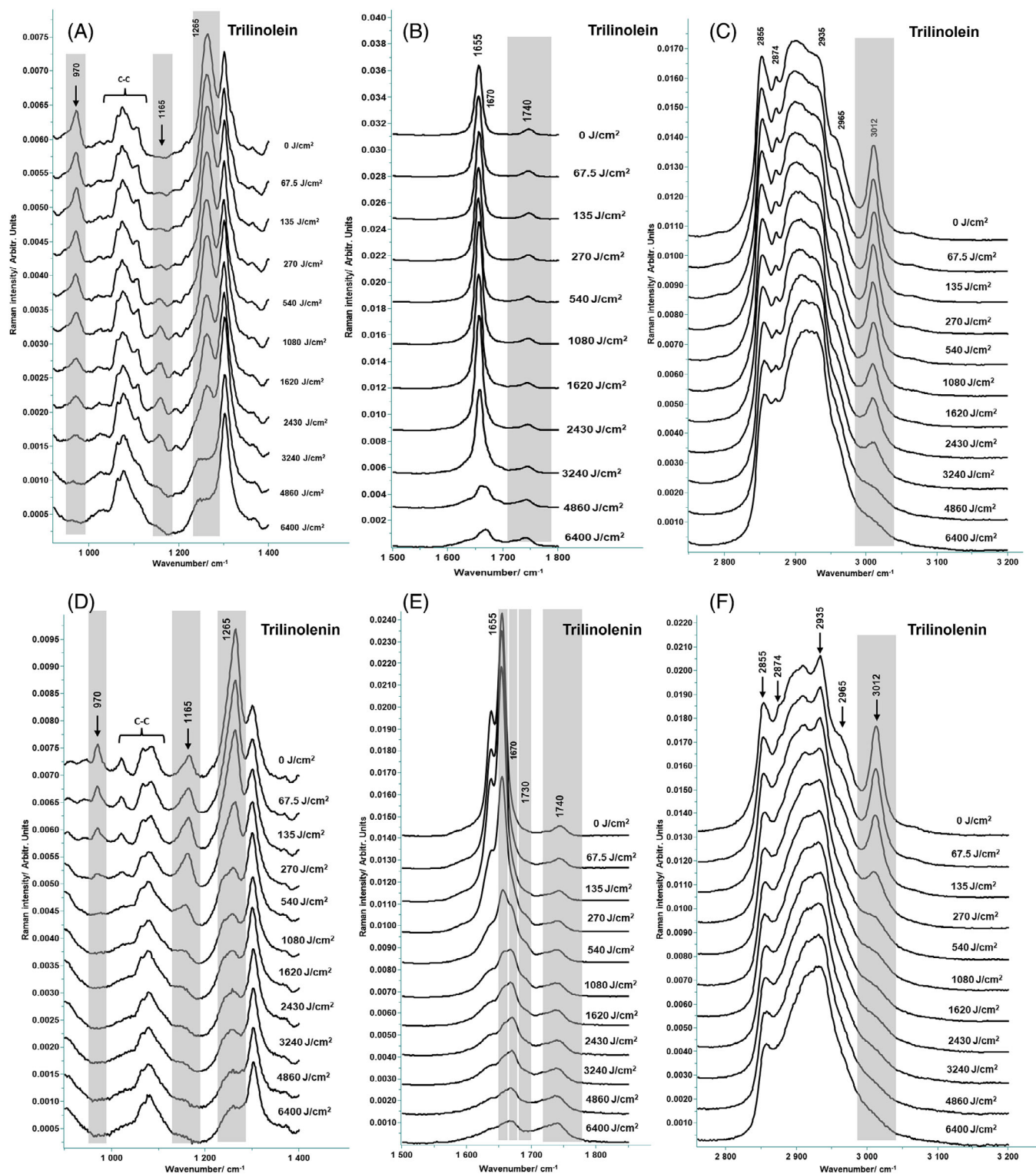


FIGURE 3 (A–F) Raman spectra of trilinolein and trilinolenin at different UV doses.

structural modifications during the photo-oxidation process, that is hydrogen abstraction, formation of hydroperoxides and peroxy radicals as primary oxidation products and the formation of aldehydes, ketones, alcohol as secondary products. In the first part, the use of vibrational spectroscopies enabled to monitor, step by step, the oxida-

tion process of fatty acids induced by different doses of solar radiations obtained under a solar simulator.¹⁷ In this part, the photo-oxidation of five TGs, tripalmitolein, 1,2-palmitolein-3-palmitin and 1,2-palmitin-3-palmitolein, trilinolein and trilinolenin was studied. Saturated and monounsaturated TG were not prone to oxidation. Trilinolein and trili-

nolenin followed an oxidation process similar to sebaleic and linolenic acids with oxidation steps occurring at lower doses.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available upon reasonable request.

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